More major labor strife near, former union militants believe

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By RANDY FURST Minneapolls Star Staff Writer

The year was 1934. The issue was union recognition. For months, strikers and employers were embroiled in



De Boer

the most massive labor confrontation in the history of Minneapolis.

Now, on the 40th anniversary of the Teamsters truck strike, some of the leaders who masterminded the union's strategy contend that another labor explosion looms on the horizon.



Dobbs

They are men in their 60s and 70s now, but the years by and large have dimmed neither their militancy nor their memories of the '34 struggle. They talk of strug-

Inflation, high-cost medical care, deteriorating social services, the environment, Watergate and military operations such as Vietnam — all are having an effect on workers, says Farrell Dobbs, 66, one of the leaders of the titanic Teamster strike.

"There's certainly no question," Dobbs says, "that there are going to be trade union struggles of large dimensions."

He says that the gradual decline in real wages will be a key component in a new labor upsurge.

With his wife, Marvell Scholl, Dobbs lives in a neat, plain 4-room apartment in Brooklyn, N.Y. Dobbs says that one of his primary objectives now is to write about his trade union experiences in the hope that they will be of use to a new generation of labor militants.

"More and more is being taken out of workers' hides," says Dobbs. "It's getting closer to the point that was reached in 1934 when workers had to say, "This is it, we've got to fight, we've got to find a way."

Other leaders who battled the police in the bloody strike of 1934 talk about labor confrontations in the offing that may be more radical than the clashes of the 1930s.

Harry DeBoer, 3230 Upton Av. N., was a 20-year-old field commander for Teamster Local 574 during the '34 strike. DeBoer was in charge of the pickets in the market

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area north of Hennepin Av. the day police opened fire in an attack that left about 50 strikers wounded and two dead.

DeBoer was shot in the leg and spent four months in the hospital.

At 60, DeBoer still talks about "the bosses" and "the capitalist system" as the enemy. He remains active in the Socialist Workers Party.

"The way things are going, something's got to break," De Bo er says, "Look at what's happening to people's standard of living. Workers are starting to see just how rotten and corrupt the politicians are — and how the big oil corporations are raking in the profits.

"The workers — they're going to do something about it," he says, smiling broadly.

Ray Rainbolt, 77, was a secondary leader during the Teamster rebellion of '34. When several key leaders were jailed, Rainbolt and two others met with Gov. Floyd Olson. Rainbolt refused to negotiate until Olson had the strike leaders released.

"I was 100 percent for those strikes," says Rainbolt. "I don't regret one minute of it."

Rainbolt also sees a new labor upsurge on the agenda. "The workers are getting tired of the fact that they aren't getting anything."

And, one of the few living leaders of the 1934 employers organization, the Citizen's Alliance, also believes that a new labor explosion is highly conceivable.

The alliance official, in his 70's, granted the interview on the condition that his name not be used. "I don't want publicity," he said.

The Citizen's Alliance was a well-organized apparatus and it fought the strike hard — recognizing that a victory for Local 574 would spur unionizing throughout Minneapolis.

That's what happened.

"They (the truckers) tried to shut the city down," the alliance official recalls. "They did," he adds quietly.

Now, the alliance official says, soaring inflation could touch off a new wave of labor strife. He thinks that social permissiveness is helping to forment a new militance.

Unions, he says, are going to wreck this country. And he points to the seizure of Wounded Knee, S.D., as evidence of things to come. He compares the '34 strikes to the Wounded Knee uprising.

Farrell Dobbs also talks about the American Indian Movement, as well as the rise of nationalism among blacks and Chicanos.

He sees it as part of a spreading radicalization that has included the rise of the student movement, the antiwar movement and women's liberation—all of which he supports.

These movements, he says, "will have an impact on the trade union movement," which he says has lagged behind politically.

"Take the Chicanos, for example," Dobbs says. "Here you have a struggle of the United Farm Workers against the agricultural monopolies and while formally, the AFL-CIO is supporting the struggle, they're doing very little for it.And one very important segment of the movement, the Teamster Union, is working hand in glove with the agricultural corporations and the capitalist government to defeat the farm workers."

Dobbs views workers as fighting a "three-front war" that includes batthe employers, the rament, and "the mistrahip of the dictatorial bureacrats who sit on top of the unions."

It was Dobbs and others like him who helped build the Teamsters and other unions into the powerful organizations they are today.

Nonetheless, Dobbs has sharp words for the current Teamster officialdom, which he accuses of suppressing democracy and of "class collaboration" of the worst kind.